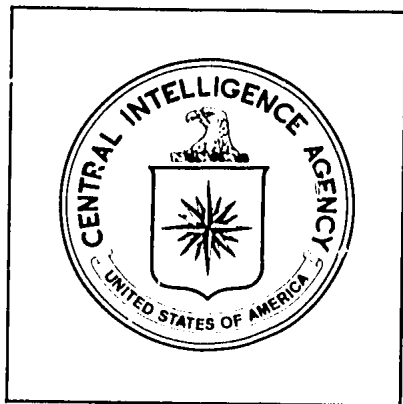


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STAFF NOTES:

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# Developments in Indochina

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Refugee Resettlement

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The refugee resettlement effort in Laos is acquiring an international image. According to an official Pathet Lao radio broadcast, two Aeroflot AN-24s are scheduled to arrive at Vientiane's Wattay airport this week, joining Royal Air Lao and non-Communist military aircraft in the airlift task. Soviet interest in the resettlement operations was first noted last month when an Aeroflot representative, along with several other Soviet personnel, made an inspection trip of the airfield at Xieng Khouang on the Plaine Des Jarres. The AN-24s, which are capable of carrying at least 40 passengers, will probably begin ferrying refugees from the capital to Xieng Khouang before the week is out.

Chinese involvement is also likely. The Pathet Lao reportedly have supplies in Luang Prabang and Sam Neua earmarked for the refugees arriving on the Plaine, but the poorly developed transport system in the Communist areas is inhibiting the delivery of the much-needed materials. To expedite transfer of the goods, the Pathet Lao might well be considering asking the Chinese to make a limited number of cargo flights. The Chinese have participated in previous airlift operations involving the royal capital and Pathet Lao headquarters.

Last month the Australian embassy offered the coalition government an Australian air force transport plane for the refugee airlift. The aircraft arrived in early March, but it reportedly developed mechanical problems after its first flight and withdrew from the airlift. Eventually the plane was flown back to its home base outside Penang, Malaysia. While mechanical difficulties may indeed have arisen, the withdrawal of the Australians from the airlift may also stem from Australian Ambassador Borthwick's

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growing anger with the Pathet Lao over their continued denials--despite incontrovertible evidence to the contrary--of any knowledge of the missing Australian tourist Neil Sharman and his American traveling companion Charles Dean.

As of mid-March more than 13,000 refugees had been relocated to either Xieng Khouang or Phong Savan, six miles to the east. While a few were filmed disembarking by an NBC television crew, the rest have been quietly and quickly moved from the landing strips to nearby temporary quarters by the Pathet Lao. The relatively small UN staff in charge of the airlift has been extremely busy organizing the refugees for the flights and has not yet had time to make any inspections of village sites in the Communist zone.

The resettlement flights are scheduled to end about April 1, and the inspection trips, which are high priority tasks for the UN staff, should begin shortly thereafter. Recently the local UN officials have been concerned with rumors filtering out of the Communist zone that returning refugees are not being allowed to return to their village of origin and are being treated in an excessively regimented fashion. The vernacular press, for example, recently reported that a refugee, who had been airlifted, managed to come back to the non-Communist side. He left his family behind and expressed disappointment at the treatment received from Pathet Lao authorities.

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